

Senator Slap, Representative Elliott, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

My name is Catherine Milton, and I am a professor of English at Norwalk Community College and native of Norwalk.

I am here today to testify in support of HB 5300, *An Act Requiring Legislative Approval For the Merger or Closing of Institutions Within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities and Prohibiting the Consolidation of the Regional-Technical Colleges*. The last several years have demonstrated that the Board of Regents is bent on pursuing an ill-conceived consolidation of the state's community colleges which is not saving Connecticut any money and is taking financial resources away from our colleges, faculty, and students in the process. The legislature needs to take oversight to preserve Connecticut's community colleges and their distinct missions and identities.

Prohibiting the merger would preserve the academic integrity of our institutions, each of which is accredited independently, and therefore can act responsively and quickly to local workforce needs. Seven years ago, Norwalk Community College was approached by local veterinarians who noted there was a shortage of Vet Techs in the area and asked the college to create a program to train them. In a matter of months, faculty had created the curriculum and launched the courses. This kind of nimble response to local community and workforce needs is impossible under a one-college behemoth of centralized administration.

The consolidation process is creating a one-size-fits-all standardized curriculum that lowers academic standards and outcomes in college-level math and English courses and takes away the academic freedom of local faculty to establish the unique programs that local businesses and communities need, and that our students want. It ignores the expertise of local faculty to set entry-level course requirements – courses that have a disproportionate number of students of color and working class students from surrounding urban areas in them.

System officials have professed that the merger is needed to ensure that students can transfer between and among the community colleges without losing credits if and when they apply for graduation. What they don't tell you is that there are simple, elegant solutions, such as common course numbering, that do not require a merger. In pursuit of the holy grail of graduation rates, which are notoriously misleading as a measure of success for community colleges, the system office is adding layer upon layer of management, while faculty positions go unfilled for years.

Help protect the Community Colleges. The students who attend are overwhelmingly from Connecticut and will stay in Connecticut to live and work. Community College students are majority black and brown, working class students. Real equity would be giving these students every opportunity to succeed by investing more in their education, not trying to save money by cutting the staff and resources that directly serve them.

Thank you.

Catherine Milton